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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

19 November 1952

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 289

Subject: Project LONGVIEW

1. The requirement for a long-term prognostication -- temporarily named Project LONGVIEW -- was formally laid on this office by the IAC on 23 October. The DCI requested the project, apparently after reading [redacted] paper entitled "War and the 25X1X7 Soviet Doctrine," which indicated that the Kremlin was "planning a war" but would not be ready to launch it before 1960.

2. Exact terms of reference for LONGVIEW have never been made clear. Such delineation of the project as there is has come not from the IAC minute but from conversations between General Smith and [redacted], Mr. Becker and Mr. Kent, and Mr. Becker and the undersigned. The understanding reached in these conversations does not quite agree with the IAC minute quoted above. Nevertheless it does seem clear that the Director wishes at least an opinion from this Office on the probable general course of events over the next ten years, and in particular on the likelihood and timing of an outbreak of general war.

3. The attached draft is unlikely to do more than serve as a starting-point for Board discussion. Two points may perhaps be made in its justification: (a) it is short, and couched intentionally in very general terms, because only general terms seem appropriate for such a paper, and because the possibility of agreement in the Board may be greater if details are avoided; (b) it is directed pretty closely to the question of general war, and not to the multitude of other problems which might have been considered.

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4. As to coordination, the IAC agreed to attempt to produce this paper through IAC machinery. If this fails, the Director will submit his own paper, leaving the members of the IAC free to comment on it independently.

5. As to deadline, the Director indicated to [REDACTED] that he wished this paper to be available around 1 December.

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Chief, Estimates Staff

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SUBJECT: ESTIMATE OF THE WORLD SITUATION THROUGH 1963, WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE LIKELIHOOD OF GENERAL WAR

PART I

Projection of Present Trends

The Balance of Power

1. Fundamental hostility between the Soviet Bloc and the group of Western nations headed by the United States is practically certain to continue throughout the period of this estimate. There is no likelihood of a general settlement of difficulties between the two camps. There is no likelihood of any considerable relaxation of tension, except perhaps as a temporary tactical maneuver by the Soviet Bloc.

2. The international situation will therefore be characterized during the decade by a recognized and conscious rivalry between two great power systems. A number of countries will remain outside the alignment, but none of these countries will be of major power.

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3. There exists at present a rough balance of power between the two systems. During the next decade each side will seize such opportunities as may offer to alter the balance in its own favor.

4. The Soviet Bloc is controlled and operated by a small ruling group which pursues objectives, uses methods, and adheres to a doctrine, all of which are well known. It is therefore possible to estimate with some confidence the probable course of developments in the power of the Bloc. We believe that, during the period of this estimate:

- a. The entire Bloc except for Communist China will remain firmly under control of the Kremlin, and will move towards the goals of the Kremlin without serious internal dissension or difficulty.
- b. Soviet Russia will remain in close accord with Communist China.

* This statement is not based upon identification and weighing of the elements of power in each system. It is rather deduced from the circumstance that neither the Soviet nor the Western power system has for two or three years made appreciable gains at the other's expense, though each has made efforts to do so, and from the fact that nobody believes that total war between the two systems would result in quick and decisive victory for either.

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- c. The Bloc economy will expand steadily, with an average annual increase of about ____ percent in Gross National Product. Over ten years the Bloc will show marked improvement in strategic stature.
- d. The Bloc will acquire a stockpile of atomic and thermonuclear weapons more than sufficient, if delivered on targets, to annihilate the centers of Western power.
- e. The USSR will greatly improve its present capability for delivering these weapons.
- f. The USSR will greatly improve its defenses against air attack.
- g. The Bloc will maintain at least the present level of conventional armaments.

5. The trend of developments in the West cannot be estimated with the same confidence as that in the Soviet Bloc, because the West lacks the unifying philosophy, the centralized direction, the totalitarian control, the dominating goals and the ruthless methods of its adversary. Unless there is global war, or imminent

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threat of it, the energies of Western nations will not be coordinated and directed primarily towards an increase of Western power. At best there will be fluctuations -- in morale, in the rate of economic growth, in the degree of united effort among allies.

6. Despite the uncertainty of trends in Western countries, we believe that during the period of this estimate:

- a. There will be a further strengthening and improvement of general public morale, though slowly, and with occasional reverses.
- b. The armed forces of the West will markedly increase, especially among the allies of the United States.
- c. The annual GNP of Western countries will increase, but more slowly than that of the Soviet Bloc. Nevertheless, the West will maintain its absolute superiority over the Bloc in this respect.
- d. The internal security, morale, and anti-Communist sentiment of states not allied with the US but

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outside the Soviet Bloc will improve. Some of these states may enter into closer relations, perhaps into alliance, with the US.

7. The details of these developments admit of great variation. Despite this obvious fact, we believe that the net effect of trends over the next decade, with respect to the strength and capabilities of the two hostile power groupings, will be as follows:

- a. The most marked changes will be such as to rectify the most obvious present deficiencies in each camp. This means that the capability of the Soviet Bloc for general war against the United States (i.e., particularly in atomic and thermonuclear weapons) will increase relatively to the capability of the United States for war against the Soviet Bloc. On the other hand, the capability of the Kremlin to carry through localized operations either by military means or by political warfare will diminish relatively to the capability of the US and its allies to forestall or to counter such operations.

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b. The rough balance of power which now exists between the two sides will continue fundamentally unchanged by the developments mentioned.

The Likelihood of War

8. General war can arise by the deliberate intention of either side or by accident -- that is, through a chain of actions and reactions not initiated with the intent of leading to general war.

9. We believe that, as long as the above-mentioned trends operate to maintain a rough balance of power between East and West, neither side will deliberately and intentionally launch general war. This belief is based on the following grounds, which cannot be argued within the scope of this paper:

a. That Communist doctrine and Soviet military theory warns against embarking upon large military adventures unless the certainty of victory is almost complete.

b. That the Soviets are convinced that, in the long run, they will in the inevitable course of history

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achieve a preponderance of power. They do not feel, as Hitler did, that a major military assault upon the West must be made within a given number of years lest the tide turn irretrievably against them.

- c. That the Soviet leaders are demonstrably cautious.
- d. That it is not the intention of the United States to launch a preventive war.
- e. That no Western nation will launch general war for purposes of aggression.

10. The likelihood of war within the next ten years thus arises mainly from the probability that situations of tension between the two camps will be allowed to develop into general war through a series of actions and counteractions by each side. Korea, Indochina, Berlin, and Iran are such situations of tension existing at present. In the course of the next decade it is almost certain that others will arise.

11. The reasons advanced in paragraph 9 above for believing that neither side will deliberately initiate general war are

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also reasons for believing that each side will be cautious in allowing events to develop into general war. The danger is recognized. On the other hand, it seems probable that the USSR, because of its increasing relative capability for waging general war against the US, may be increasingly disposed to risk and to accept if not to initiate such a war. It may therefore follow courses of action involving greater risks than it has lately been running. Moreover, the increase of Western capabilities for preventing and countering local aggressions and local revolutionary situations will mean that any local act of aggression by the Soviet Bloc must, if it is to be successful, be of a magnitude likely to lead to general war. Finally, the US may choose to implement some of its increased capabilities for local action in areas which the Soviets may consider vital.

12. It follows from the above argument that the likelihood of general war will tend to increase as the strengths and capabilities of each side increase. As each side repairs the deficiencies in its power, and overcomes its most conspicuous vulnerabilities, it will probably grow more impatient of the long indeterminacy of the contest. Each side will probably

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grow slightly less cautious, and less averse to running grave risks of general war. We believe that this tendency will continue through the decades.

13. Despite these considerations, it will probably remain true that neither side actively desires general war. For this reason we do not believe that war during the period of this estimate is inevitable. By skillful political action it can probably be avoided without the sacrifice of vital interests on either side.

PART II

Possible New Developments

14. The foregoing paragraphs have approached the problem by projecting in a most general way presently discernible trends. However, it is likely that the course of events during the period of this estimate will be largely determined by events at present unforeseen, or by trends which though perceptible at present are now considered of subordinate importance. The following paragraphs will consider some of these events and trends.

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Major Alteration of the Balance of Power

15. Any major upset of the balance of power between Soviet and non-Soviet systems would increase the danger of general war. Should either side suddenly gain unquestioned superiority in weapons by technological advance, that side would be tempted to use this temporary superiority to achieve its objectives. General war might then depend on whether or not the other side surrendered without fighting. On the other hand, if either side should by gradual accretion of power show signs of permanently upsetting the balance, then the other side would probably feel compelled to resort to war before defeat became certain. In this way an over-development of power by either side might provoke the other to attack.

16. If the balance of power is fundamentally impaired during the period of this estimate, however, we believe it is most likely to occur because of a significant weakening of the West owing to economic recession and political dissensions.

a. The experience of 1949 demonstrated that a minor recession of trade in the United States was sufficient to cause major dislocations in the economy

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of US allies. It is practically certain that considerable downward adjustments in economic and trade conditions throughout the West will occur from time to time during the next decade. There is no international machinery to deal immediately and effectively with such fluctuations. The weakening effects of an appreciable trade recession upon the Western community do not need elaboration. Moreover, as each government took measures to preserve the standard of living of its own citizenry, political dissension between Western states would probably increase.

b. Effective organization of Western power depends upon holding together in close association, especially but not exclusively in the NATO alliance, nations of diverse traditions and sometimes conflicting aims. In particular, the rivalry between France and Germany, and the fears of France that Germany will come to dominate Europe, present problems of great magnitude in keeping the Western combination together. We cannot be assured that NATO itself can survive this rivalry.

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17. There is evidence that the Kremlin expects the balance of power ultimately to change decisively in its favor owing to economic collapse and political dissension among the Western powers. The Kremlin will certainly take such steps as it thinks effective to further such developments. It will wage political warfare in an attempt to win away from the Western camp even those states which are not endangered by economic difficulties. It will attempt to gain recruits from areas of the world such as the Middle East and Latin America where dislike of Western nations is prevalent.

18. We believe that the Kremlin would be unlikely to take advantage of a notable decline in the strength of the Western alliance by deliberately initiating general war. It would not need to do so. It might try to further Western disintegration by relaxing political tension, but more probably it would redouble its political warfare efforts, and blackmail the more vulnerable members of the Western alliance with threats of atomic attack. Under the circumstances such blackmail would be apt to succeed, and the US might then be forced to contemplate initiating general war as the only way in which to prevent a further and disastrous deterioration of its power position.

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Possible Developments in Germany and Japan

19. West Germany has among its principal national objectives the re-uniting of Germany and the recovery of lost territories beyond the Oder-Neisse line. Both these objectives involve vital interests of the Soviet Bloc. We do not suppose that West Germany in its present weak condition seriously contemplates the initiation of general war as a means for attaining its objectives. In the course of the next decade, however, West Germany will certainly become much stronger, and may attain formidable military force. In the past wars have often arisen through the energetic or aggressive acts of lesser members of an alliance. We believe it possible that a greatly strengthened West Germany, perhaps under more strongly nationalistic government than at present, might by accident or by design involve the US in such a chain of events as to lead almost inescapably to general war.

20. The national objectives of Japan are not so obviously aimed at vital interests of the Soviet Bloc as are those of West Germany. It is nevertheless possible that a greatly strengthened Japan might try once again to expand its sphere

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of influence in Asia by force, driven in part by the necessities of its economic life.

21. None of the other allies of the US have goals the accomplishment of which would seriously prejudice vital interests of the Soviet Bloc.

22. Death of Stalin. Presumably Stalin will either die or otherwise be removed from control of the USSR during the period of this estimate. Such an event would probably have one of three consequences, between which we find no basis whatever for deciding at the present time. It might (a) occasion no appreciable change in the conduct and character of the Soviet regime; (b) cause a withdrawal of the Soviet rulers into preoccupation with domestic affairs and with personal wrangles for power; (c) cause a considerably increased aggressiveness and even the deliberate provocation of general war.

23. Decline in Soviet Aggressiveness. We see no likelihood whatever of a collapse of the Soviet regime during the period of this estimate, or of its significant weakening, or of its ceasing to constitute the principal power center over against the US. It is possible, however, that as time goes on

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new Soviet rulers will be men of less revolutionary and doctrinal fervor. Their devotion to the principle of conflict between Communist and non-Communist systems may abate. They may prefer a life less marked by continual international tension. It is conceivable that the beginnings of such a trend might be discernible within the period of this estimate. Such a development, if it should occur, would not wholly obviate the danger of general war. It would, however, alter the character of international relations very greatly, in ways which it is not necessary to investigate at this time.

PART III

Conclusions as to Timing

24. We do not believe that the Kremlin has any timetable -- that it expects or plans for the outbreak of general war at any definite time in the future.

25. We believe that the Kremlin is at present strongly disposed to avoid general war against the US and its allies, primarily because it considers such war unnecessary and imprudent for the achievement of its ultimate objectives.

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26. We believe that the disposition of the Kremlin to avoid general war or grave risk of general war will lessen as the capabilities of the Soviet Bloc for waging such war increase; i.e., as its atomic and thermonuclear capabilities become greater, as its capabilities for delivering these weapons against targets in the US improve, as its air defense becomes stronger, and as the economic development of the Soviet Union approaches the level considered necessary for general war. None of these developments, we believe, is possible before 1956.

27. A significant weakening of the Western alliance, owing to general economic recession with accompanying political dissensions, is unlikely before the latter part of 1954. Whether such a development ever takes place will, of course, be dependent primarily upon the policy followed by Western countries, and especially by the US. The initiative in this instance is not with the Bloc but with the West, although Bloc policies will be directed towards promoting any decline of Western strength.

28. The attainment by Germany or Japan of strength sufficient to allow either country to pursue independent policies or engage in activities tending toward the provoking of general war

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will not occur before 1954, and probably not until later than that year.

29. We conclude, therefore, that of those factors now identifiable which seem to increase the likelihood of general war, most will not be fully operable before 1956. We do not mean to estimate that there is no likelihood of war at the present time, or at any time before 1956. Rather, we believe that for the period of this estimate the danger of war will remain approximately the same from now until about mid-1956; thereafter it will gradually increase to the end of the period.

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